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ABSTRACT

The 1971 International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) resolution establishing a working group on developing countries has brought about one of the more successful and dramatic changes for IFLA in its relationship with the third world. Its reputation has been transformed from a generally European-American orientation to that of a truly worldwide organization. In response to a 400 percent increase in membership, IFLA in 1976 added a special Division of Regional Activities encompassing Asian, African, and Latin American sections. These regional library activities have been generously supported by the Canadian International Development Agency allowing the establishment of regional secretariats at Kuala Lumpur, Dakar, and Bogota, and support of programs like ELIPA (Experienced Library and Information Personnel in Asia), a computerized bio-database of professionals. Additionally, in cooperation with Unesco, IFLA has supported programs of great promise to the third world, including the development of standards for library statistics, international standards for cataloging, the public library manifesto, and recognition for the problems of universal bibliographic control and availability of publications. (RAA)

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# A DECADE OF INTERNATIONAL LIBRARY CO-OPERATION THROUGH IFLA: A THIRD WORLD PERSPECTIVE

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The 1970s ushered in a new era of International Co-operation in Library Development especially among the developing countries. The need was increasingly felt by the younger library professions to look beyond national frontiers for solutions to their many challenging problems. The sharing of experiences and the pooling of resources to their optimum advantage gained wide appeal. Newer pathways for a fuller and more effective role of librarians consonant with the national and regional needs and aspirations gained expression.

The library profession in countries that were linked by common bonds of economic, political and cultural ties took full advantage of their close relations to foster the establishment of a regional grouping of librarians. Typical of this trend in S.E. Asia was the holding of the first conference of S.E. Asian Librarians (CONSAL) in Singapore in August 1970, which brought together the library pro-

fessions from seven South East Asian countries. Today, CONSAL has earned its rightful place as an authoritative regional arm of the profession.

Similar developments in other regions were also evident at about the same period. In the Carribean, the Association of Carribean University and Research Libraries (ACURIL) was established in 1969 with the same primary objective of sharing the regional library resources. The library professions in many of the developing countries which were former colonies were brought together in the spirit of International Library Co-operation at the founding of the Commonwealth Library Association (COMLA) in 1971 in London. Associations linking libraries with special subject interests in different parts of the world were also formed. Problems of libraries serving metropolitan areas became the primary responsibility of the International Association of Metropolitan Libraries (INTAMEL) which was founded in 1968. International Co-operation for the development of school librarianship was recognised in the formation of the International Association of School Librarianship (IASL) in 1971.

In keeping with this trend, the 37th IFLA General Council meeting held in Liverpool in 1971 was in many ways a culmination of the International Library Co-operation that has already gained increasing momentum in regional and international activity. The emergence of IFLA on the scene depicting a new image of worldwide interest and participation had a catalytic effect on the growing interest in international library co-operation. IFLA's own "International" image had to be reappraised and redefined to incorporate the needs and aspirations of the younger library professions. The first IFLA "Pre-session" seminar at Liverpool

with a participation of thirty or more librarians from the third world countries proved an unprecedented and stimulating experience in the sharing of experiences between the developing and developed countries. The success of the first pre-session seminar clearly underlined the need to promote the holding of such seminars at regular intervals. The importance of such seminars in providing an opportunity for direct interaction between the developing and developed countries on topics of mutual interest was clearly recognised. It also greatly enhanced participation from the developing countries at IFLA General Conferences. Thanks to the generous recurrent support from Unesco and other government agencies, the "Pre-session" seminars have now become a regular feature of IFLA General Council Meetings and are generally held every alternate odd year with a few exceptions.

One of the most significant outcome of the Liverpool conference was the adoption of the following resolution to establish a Working Group for Developing Countries:

> "That a working group on Developing Countries be created to act as a co-ordinating agency with the other Sections and Committees of IFLA and to provide a forum for discussion of library problems of common interest to developing countries .... The first task of this committee will be to identify the major problems facing libraries in developing countries and to consider within the framework of IFLA ways by which these problems might be resolved."

The division of the IFLA membership into the "haves" and "have nots" using a purely economic criteria was unprecedented in its history and naturally not readily appreciated. Dr Herman Liebaers, then President of IFLA and acknowledged as the Architect of the new

"worldwide" IFLA, accepted the establishment of the working group for the developing countries as a necessary compromise. It was recognised that the resolution would offer a tangible incentive to the third world countries to work closely with IFLA and share with the International Federation their many peculiar and difficult problems and hopefully find acceptable solutions.

In reminising over the past decade of developments particularly with IFLA's relations with the third world countries, this single resolution to establish the working group triggered off a chain reaction that brought about one of the most successful and dramatic changes in IFLA in its relationship with the third world than any other resolutions in its history. The formulation of the resolution might have been quite incidental, but the spirit of the resolution expressing IFLA's deep commitment to serve the needs of the third world countries won the appreciation and goodwill of the less developed countries. IFLA's international image rapidly transformed from a generally European-American orientation to that of a truly worldwide organisation, reflected in the spectacular increase in its membership from the younger library professions in the third world. Figure 1 brings to perspective the impressive growth of IFLA's membership from the developing regions of Asia, Africa and Latin America and the Carribean during the past decade.

The Asian Regional Section is by far the largest with a total membership of 135 which is equivalent to the sum total of the membership from the other two regional sections. Unlike the other two sections, the Asian Section suffers from want of a more precise geographical definition of the area it should encompass. The Asian Section presently includes countries from the Mediterranean and

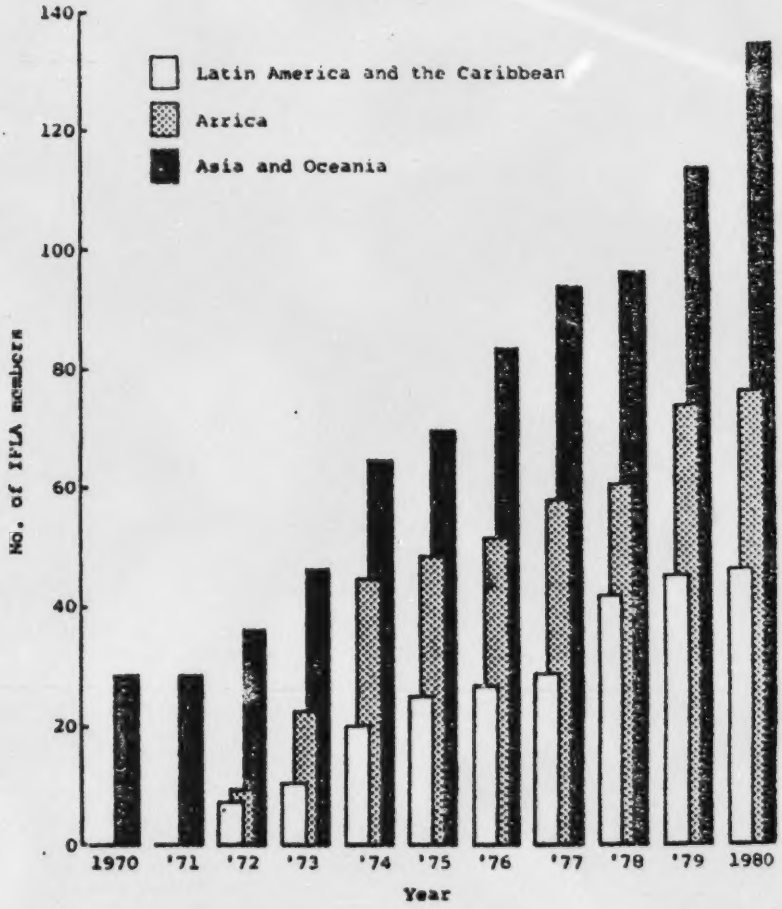


Figure 1. Growth of IFLA members in developing region of the world.

Middle East to S.E. Asia and Oceania. Obviously this vast conglomeration of countries with widely differing ethic, cultural and literary lackground makes the continued recognition of this heterogeneous group as a regional section questionable. With sufficient response and interest from the Middle East and Mediterranean countries, IFLA should soon give careful consideration to the establishment of a separate regional section for the area. The practical feasibility of attempting to initiate or co-ordinate effective and meaningful professional programmes in an area that is greater than the total area of Europe,

North America and Australia put together just does not make any sense.

Notwithstanding the geographical constraints of the regional definition, a growth of more than 400% in the IFLA membership from the third world countries has been registered between 1972 and 1980. There was an overall total of 48 members in 1972 from the third world, including 34 from Asia, 7 from Africa and 7 from Latin America and the Carribean. The 48 members were distributed in about 30 countries. The 1980 figures show a marked increase of the membership with an overall total of 228 members from the developing countries, including 135 in Asia, 67 in Africa and 47 in Latin America and the Carribean. There are now about sixty-five countries in the third world where there are IFLA members, including 43 countries which have national Association members. About 60% of the countries represented in IFLA are from the developing region, accounting for about 23% of the overall total IFLA membership.

This unprecedented awakening of the library professions in the third world to bring their problems and solutions to the international forum of librarians represented in IFLA, symbolises a new era in International Library Co-operation and Development. Whatever the initial inhibitions were that restrained participation in IFLA appears to have been diminished, if not removed. If there are still some countries left who are not members of IFLA it is certainly not due to their lack of interest but other constraints beyond their control. The eagerness and enthusiasm of the new member countries to identify their many varied problems with the professional programme of activities of the International body and to seek some form of redress or assistance need to be reciporcated with an effective programme consonant with their national needs and aspirations.

IFLA's newly gained worldwide reputation and strength needs to be continuously sustained and expanded. Afterall, the strength of the Federation is no more than what its membership would want it to be. No efforts are spared in the continued drive to enlist as many members as possible, especially in countries who do not as yet have any IFLA members. Notwithstanding the fact that the membership dues for the developing countries have been kept to a realistic minimum, many of them find even this minimum dues, beyond their ability to pay. The cordial understanding and goodwill that prevails between the developing and developed countries in IFLA has made it possible for some of the younger library professions to be sponsored by the developed countries by paying their dues for the first few years and hopefully to encourage them to continue their membership in the Federation. It must be appreciated that IFLA is by no means an International funding agency and most of its operational cost is derived from its membership dues and grants received from various bodies. As far as developing countries are concerned, the dues paid just about offsets the cost of the various publications received from IFLA.

IFLA has responded to the growing support received from the third world countries. In the restructuring of the organisation of IFLA in 1976, due acknowledgement was given to the drastically changed composition of membership, especially from the third world countries. In advocating a regional orientated programme for the developing countries, a special Division of Regional Activities (DRA) was established as one of the eight professional divisions of IFLA. This division with three present regional sections in Asia, Africa and Latin America and the Carribean is largely concerned with the overall problems of the third world countries in all its manifestations

and acts as the focal point and chief interface with these countries. Its professional interests permeates into the twenty-five or so sections and about a dozen round tables of the other seven Divisions which embody most of the professional programme developed in IFLA. The DRA helps to co-ordinate and develop suitable projects for library and information services in developing countries and maintaining close rapport with most of the sections and round tables. Almost all the sections and round tables have grown increasingly conscious of the basic needs of the developing professions. This is clearly reflected in the planning and development of their professional programmes where special attention is given to the needs of the younger library professions. An increasing number of librarians from the third world serve on the standing committees of the various sections. About half the existing standing committees have at least one member from the third world serving on them. Close rapport is also maintained between the various professional sections and the Division of Regional Activities in the planning and promotion of suitable joint programmes.

Regional library activities have now assumed a permanent and important place in the overall development of professional programmes in IFLA. As a consequence of the rapid increase of membership from the third world countries, it has become necessary for IFLA to harness all available resources both financial and manpower to meet the growing demand for assistance from the younger library professions. The increase in revenue from subscription dues is just about enough to meet the basic servicing cost of the new members, leaving very little, if any, for projects. It is in this context that one should appreciate the generous and timely assistance received from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) without

which the Regional Activities Programme of IFLA would have been seriously handicapped. Indeed, CIDA has proved to be the chief stalwart of support and its recurrent grants for the past so many years have contributed in no small way to sustain and expand the regional activities programme. The establishment and maintenance of the three regional secretariats in Kuala Lumpur, Dakar and Bogota owe their existence to the CIDA grant.

The CIDA funds also made it possible for IFLA to respond to some of the basic needs of the third world by giving valuable financial support by way of "project assistance". Many worthwhile projects that can make significant and meaningful contribution to national or regional development of library services suffer from want of basic financial assistance to get started. Between 1974 and 1979 a total of about thirty "project assistance" requests were submitted to the Division of Regional Activities for consideration. A total of about US$40,000/- was approved to support about half the applications in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Most of the projects could be categorised under the broad heading of "Organisation of Conferences, Seminars and Workshops on Specific Topics". Unfortunately there were very few projects which involved a research or investigative approach to certain basic problems affecting library development. Perhaps more attention and support need to be given to these type of projects in the future.

One project that deserves to be singled out is ELIPA (Experienced Library and Information Personnel in Asia) which was originally initiated by the IFLA Regional Section for Asia. It is essentially the building up of a computerised bio-data base of experienced library and information personnel in Asia. The rationale behind the project is to be able to

quickly identify individuals with the required expertise in the Asian Region who could be called upon to undertake consultancy work in support of library and information development needs in the region. The interest in the project has spread well beyond the confines of IFLA and has today evolved into a joint project supported financially by IFLA, IDRC (International Development Research Council) and FID. The project is being co-ordinated by the Korean Institute of Science and Technology in Seoul, Korea.

The symbiotic relationship that prevails between IFLA and UNESCO in the development of library and information services particularly in the third world are well known. UNESCO's continued support of the Pre-session seminars deserves special mention. If there is today a marked increase in the participation of third world countries in IFLA meetings and an increasing awareness among these countries of IFLA's global efforts to solve some basic problems affecting library services, it is due to the generous support received from UNESCO and other agencies in support of the Pre-session seminars There are not many members in the developing countries who are endowed with the financial support to participate in IFLA meetings held thousands of miles from their home. Financial assistance for travel to IFLA meetings will continue to be a very critical factor that will determine the extent of participation from the developing countries. IFLA should be continuously alert to this need and do everything possible to assist within the limited resources at its disposal.

IFLA has to its credit an impressive list of achievements in international library development and co-operation. Just to mention a few, its contributions to develop standards for library statistics

now accepted by UNESCO, the public library manifesto; the international standards in cataloguing. IFLA's UBC programme has brought about an increasing recognition of the problems of bibliographical control the world over and has had a tremendous influence on many developing countries to take preliminary steps to have their national output of publications recorded in an internationally accepted format to facilitate easy identification. More recently increasing interest has evolved in the international availability of publications as projected in the UAP programme. Here again UNESCO and IFLA are working very closely to promote this programme as an essential compliment to the UBC programme. It holds much promise for the third world countries in trying to achieve an "improved access to publications by increasing the availability and speed of interlending services and by developing simple, efficient procedures.

The changes brought about in IFLA in the past decade are unprecedented and has made the International Federation a truly world wide organisation. Ten years ago in his message to the first Conference of South East Asian Librarians, the President of IFLA, Dr Herman Liebaers, asked and I quote, "Why should IFLA not organise in a reasonable near future its annual meeting in South East Asia? Today we are the witness to that prophetic remark and fortunate partakers of this historical event in the history of IFLA. In Copenhagen last year we witnessed yet another significant change in IFLA in its relationship to the third world. For the first time a third world member was elected to the Executive Board of the Federation. I do not see why we should not have at least one more member from the third world on the Executive Board in the not too distant future. International Library Co-operation in IFLA is truly advancing and the third world are no longer silent spectators but active participants.